Borders of Chinese Civilization

Geography and History at Empire's End

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Introduction

In antiquity, the Yellow Emperor undertook a journey that would bring relief to all the disunited. He traveled Under-Heaven in all directions, established coordinates of a myriad leagues, delineated the wild, demarcated the administrative districts, and produced the domains of a hundred leagues and the myriad precincts. The *Classic of Changes* germanely relates, “The ancient kings enfeoffed the myriad domains and treated the various lords as relations”; and the *Classic of Documents*, “[He] pacified and harmonized the myriad domains.”

*Treatise on Earth’s Patterns,* History of the Han

If Jan defines the border for himself as the line of the greatest admissible repetition, I must correct him. The border is not a product of repetition. Repetition is only a means of making the border visible. The line of the border is covered with dust, and repetition is like the whisk of a hand removing the dust.

Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

This study concerns, most centrally, borders—those cultural, social, and political borders that work to define and delimit human relationships in our world. These borders, according to Kundera, are always present: from the most idiosyncratic preference for the shape of an eye, to the most tenuous boundary between ill-defined nations, to the arguably most constitutive feature that distinguishes human societies: language. Although creatures of habit, we may, if thoughtful, perceive the borders of our worlds in the space between the familiar and the possible—in the arena of repetition. The present study specifically concerns the borders between Chinese and Japanese in the changing world of the 1870s and eighties, and the activities of a certain group of these men as they worked to maintain and reproduce a distinctly Chinese understanding of the human world. It was in these acts of repetition—the activities of conversing and writing—that these men disclosed the borders separating themselves not only from one another, but also from their own histories—as well as from the third
party that increasingly figured in cultural, social, and political matters, whom both Chinese and Japanese named the “West.”

This study explores these borders of cultural identities. It is not a book about Japan, nor is it primarily concerned with the content of what Chinese thought about Japan; rather, it explores the ways in which Chinese categorized Japan as an object of knowledge. Historians have well documented the intricacies of Chinese and Japanese diplomacy and the intense debate that ensued in both the Chinese court and the Japanese government over Westernization policies. Here I will be only marginally concerned with official policy, or with the success or failure of Westernization. The primary issue is not politics or diplomacy; it is the cultural epistemology that informs certain forms of cultural interaction. I am interested in disclosing those cultural practices that enabled Chinese observers in Japan not only to identify Japan with Chinese Civilization but also to differentiate Japan from China. In time, some Chinese would identify Japan with the West.

Accordingly, I examine Chinese perceptions and representations of Japan in the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the century, Japan remained an inaccessible and insignificant island kingdom at the eastern edge of Chinese Civilization, much as it had been since the 1640s; at century’s end, Chinese were debating the meaning of their deplorable 1895 defeat at the hands of the presumptuous and aggressive empire of Japan. Chinese perceptions of Japan underwent marked vicissitudes in the course of the century, and it is the main purpose of this study to elucidate the Chinese understanding of Japan during the critical decades of the 1870s and 1880s, when Chinese perceived an alarming shift taking place in Japan. Japan was leaving behind the universal order known as Civilization, and establishing itself within another, alien order based on a new “international” principle forced upon the world of East Asia by the West. Among Chinese observers, this corresponded to a shift in worldviews: from a Chinese worldview based on hierarchy and unification to a Euro-American world view based on equality and differentiation. My argument is simply that Japan, which had periodically caused some awkwardness to Chinese Civilization, proved to be intrinsically destabilizing to Chinese sensibilities in the late nineteenth century. Once Japan was removed from the Chinese worldview, that worldview was irreparably changed. The encounter with Japan, in other words, presented Chinese scholars and officials in Japan with concrete evidence of the practical limits to the worldview of their Civilization; it is these limits that I identify as “borders of Chinese Civilization.”

From the perspective of Chinese knowledge and representations of the world, this categorization of Japan as an object of knowledge was above all geographical. To the educated mind of the 1800s, Chinese represented foreign peoples and kingdoms—be they tax-paying subjects of the Chinese emperor, tribute-bearing participants to the Chinese Empire, or barbarians beyond the borders of Chinese Civilization—under the rubric of either “Lands of the Earth” (yudi) or, most often, “Earth’s Patterns” (didi). While this understanding of the lay of the land corresponds to our conception of geography (and in fact “didi” is the standard contemporary Chinese translation for “geography”), there are ways in which our geography differs significantly from yudi and didi.

As scholars of European and American history have observed, our study of geography is closely related to the expanding capitalism of the nineteenth century. Raymond Schwab, Edward Said, and others have noted that the European heritage of exploration and plunder, of conquest and colonization, was reconstructed after Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt to form the new science of geography in western Europe. In France, for example, university geography was institutionalized as an academic discipline in the 1870s, in reaction to France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (a consequence, some claimed, of inadequate maps) and as France expanded its colonial empire into Southeast Asia. There are, in short, formal relations between our economics and politics, our social sciences, and our practice of geography; whatever these may be, it is worthwhile to remember, in the words of one scholar, that “space, as a social fact, as a social factor and as an instance of society, is always political and strategic.” It is with an eye to the consequences of this observation, then, and another to the difference between geography and didi, that one purpose here will be to elucidate Chinese geographical representations as primarily historical knowledge and, specifically, to elucidate Chinese representations of Japan as geographical and historical knowledge.

In China, this matter of didi, or geography, was traditionally subordinate to the historical claims of imperial rule. The first in the series of official dynastic histories, History of the Han (Han shu), was completed in the first century A.D. and inaugurated the tradition of including a “Treatise on
Earth’s Patterns” (Dili zhi) within the official dynastic history. It was the purpose of this treatise to record changes in place-names and local administrative districts comprising the empire, as well as descriptions of mountain ranges, river systems, taxable products, and so on. Over the centuries, as the Chinese Empire expanded southward and westward, descriptions of more distant regions and foreign peoples were included in, respectively, the “Treatise on Earth’s Patterns” and the sections entitled “Arrayed Biographies” (Liezhuans) in the official dynastic history. Although independent works on geography, modeled after the official “Treatise on Earth’s Patterns,” were written from the fifth century on and evolved into geographical encyclopedias by the thirteenth century, the production of such books inexplicably declined thereafter, their place taken by travel diaries, treatises on localities, collections of poetry on foreign themes, and other minor and more personal or immediate genres. Meanwhile, official Chinese geography remained intimately involved with the claims of imperial rule, and was primarily historicist and textual (rather than iconic—relying on diagrams and maps) for much of the imperial age.

As I demonstrate in my examination of Chinese representations of Japan, there were two fundamental modes of geographical representations available to scholars in the late nineteenth century. One of these I call the poetic, or performative, by which I mean that a geographic representation provides the experience of an encounter abroad. As I show, this was the primary claim made on behalf of travelogues and travel poetry. The other I call the expository, by which I mean that a third-person and abstracted representation of reality makes a certain claim to truthfulness as objective knowledge. This latter was in fact the dominant mode of geographical representation officialized in the dynastic history “Treatise on Earth’s Patterns.” Although the expository corresponds to what we might think of as quintessentially “historical,” these representations are nonetheless historical in ways that may seem unusual to the Euro-American reader.

Moreover, it is not the case that these are two strictly distinct and incompatible modes of representation. Although loosely associated with two traditional explanations of textuality, one concerning the natural capacity of poetry to give voice to human intention (shi yan zhi) and the other concerning the capacity of truthful writing to serve as a vehicle for the Way of the Ancient Sages (wen yi zai dao), these two modes of representation can be traced to a duality as old as the self-consciousness of Chinese Civilization: poetry and historical document, collected respectively in the ancient Classic of Poetry (Shi jing) and Classic of Documents (Shu jing). One consequence of intellectual movements during the eighteenth century was a deliberate historicism among certain scholars, one of whom, Zhang Xuecheng (1735–1801), attempted to eradicate the difference between poetry and history—he asserted that all texts, even the Classics, should be considered equally the objects of history. These are, in other words, fundamental epistemological strategies of Chinese geographical representations, and my extensive interest in the scholar, poet, and diplomat Huang Zunxian (1848–1905), for example, lies precisely in his unusual attempt to integrate the two.

In effect, this study examines the epistemology underlying Chinese perceptions of Japan and Japan’s Westernization. Rather than discuss these problems only in terms of diplomatic relations, I treat them as problems of knowledge and representations. This approach seems preferable, because, in the first place, it is important to begin by validating a Chinese worldview so different from our own. Too often Chinese historians have seen the nineteenth century in terms of “tradition versus modernity,” a dichotomy that has had the effect of characterizing nineteenth-century Chinese leaders as misguided or ill prepared for modernizing China. The fact remains that most Chinese scholars saw the world differently from us, and, as I hope to demonstrate, it is worthwhile to begin by taking seriously what they took to be valid representations of their world.

So, in addition to elucidating these strategies for geographical knowledge and the literary forms in which they are represented, I examine the grounding of geography in this Chinese worldview. Geographical representation in China is not simply an inert body of texts, but a participant in the intellectual activity of informing and interpreting the world; geographical texts attest both to ways in which Chinese scholars and officials understood the outside world and to ways in which that perceived outside world began to change in the late nineteenth century. To the degree that Chinese perceptions of Japan reflect China’s position in the world, Chinese perceptions of change in Japan reflect the movement of China’s changing position in the world.

The Chinese had of course known of Japan for some fifteen hundred years, and Japan had appropriated a great deal of Chinese culture beginning in the seventh century A.D. Chinese dynastic histories systematically
document that through the centuries, the Chinese court had received Japanese embassies, tribute missions, students, and merchants, in a manner enacting for both peoples distinctive roles befitting, on the one hand, the suppliant Japanese, and on the other, the imperial lords of the "Central Kingdom," benevolent dispensers of Civilization. If this Chinese version of such interaction impresses us with the overall agreeability of both parties, we are perhaps reassured by the occasional testimonials of Chinese ire toward the Japanese—for example, in reaction to Japanese ill treatment of Kubilai Khan's Chinese messenger in the late 1200s, or the Japanese invasion of Korea in the 1990s. Nevertheless, the intense and mutually satisfying exchange that took place between the seventh and tenth centuries lingered long after the fact, immortalized in poetry attesting to the friendship of the two peoples, and this available store of textual evidence habitually reappeared as proof of and justification for Japan's inclusion within Chinese Civilization.

Accordingly, the historical actors who both orient and actuate this essay—mainly Chinese and Japanese scholars and officials—joined together out of their common interest in Chinese Civilization. Since most of these men could not speak the language of the other group, they "conversed" with each other in writing—in the literary Chinese language—a practice called "brushalking." As I describe, these brushalks took place in Tokyo in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The Chinese were scholars and diplomats connected to the first Chinese embassy in Japan, as well as distinguished Chinese travelers to Japan; the Japanese were mainly conservative educators and officials, not hostile to the Meiji Restoration, but somewhat suspicious of both its "chaotic" offshoots (the Freedom and People's Rights Movement of 1874-1889) and the Meiji government's authoritarian reaction to that series of events. These men instead hoped to supplement Meiji ideology with a moral training based in the models provided by Chinese texts.

As members of the educated and ruling classes in the nineteenth century, these Chinese and Japanese men understood that the authority legitimizing their worldview was based in a literary tradition claiming a history two thousand years old; they understood that they participated in administration because they were learned, and that the goal of all learning was, after self-cultivation, the proper administration of one's family, one's state, the universe. If in China by the 1870s, learning and the testing of learning for purposes of entry into the ruling bureaucracy had grown formalistic, pedantic, and stagnant, the two were nonetheless based upon the two most established branches of writing, history and poetry. Ideally, the best official was a scholar learned in history and the Confucian classics, who could not only formulate policy based on sound historical precedent and express his opinion in well-composed memorials that included both eloquent turns of phrase and allusions that gave evidence of his learning, but also compose poetry suitable for a variety of official functions and public occasions, poetry that in its choice of word again gave evidence of a solid grounding in antecedent allusions, and in its form attested to the balance and regularity of the author's character.

That this literary Chinese language, this set of classical texts, and this understanding of the human world persisted for so many centuries surely testifies to the hegemonic persuasiveness of the Chinese worldview. To be sure, Chinese rulers were exceedingly successful at institutionalizing this worldview through academies and the examination system, but such success does not account for the persistence of the language, the texts, and the worldview outside of China—in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and others of China's neighbors. Indeed, this "international" aspect of the Chinese understanding of the human world offers a measure of truth to Chinese claims of the universality of their worldview, which, in the words of my subjects in the 1870s, was essentialized and referred to as wenming or "Civilization." (So in this study I treat "Civilization" as a proper noun and indicate it with a capital.)

In fact, I have chosen Japan to examine as an object of Chinese geographical understanding largely because the position of Japan vis-à-vis China was so contestable in the nineteenth century. Chinese travelers to Japan at the time quite comfortably declared Japan a tongwen zhi guo, a "country sharing language," or as I argue, by virtue of the synchronic relationship between the literary Chinese language and Civilization in the Chinese worldview, a "country sharing Civilization." However, these claims of Japanese cultural affiliation to China were not matched in political relations. Of particular ire to Chinese officials in the late nineteenth century was Japan's perverse disregard for Chinese diplomatic principles and its insistence on following the Western pattern. The changing world order in the nineteenth century presented Chinese with a critical choice: was China to deal with Japan as kin, in terms of tong wen (shared lan-
language/Civilization), or as an alien of the Western sort? Ultimately, this was a question of rival claims to universality: the Chinese model of Civilization described relations with foreign domains in terms of proximity, and proposed to order the various domains according to principles of hierarchy and unification; the Westerners, by contrast, described foreign relations in terms of an international legality that promised equality and differentiation. In the end, this study suggests, growing contradictions undermined the Chinese model of Civilization as a viable possibility.

There is a gifted dancer and choreographer in Taiwan, Lin Huaimin. In one of his solo pieces, the stage lights up to reveal a man, front-stage corner, left, dressed in a white court robe (white: read “funeral/mourning”). He proceeds to move diagonally across the stage, seeming to gather momentum, but the further he gets, the more we see that his progress is hindered by the train of the robe, which finally extends thirty feet across the stage. The dance then consists of the man’s attempts to overcome this restraint, his twisting and turning, and grabbing at the train of his robe, until finally he has gathered it all up in his arms, only to realize that the sheer weight of the entirety makes him immobile, and then tottering, unable to stand still, and so the innumerable folds of the train begin to slip through his arms, sliding along the stage again. The stage blackens. No curtains are drawn.

In the program notes that particular night, Lin Huaimin added an explanation for those in the audience who preferred their dances less abstract, to the effect that this was a portrayal of a man burdened with five thousand years of Chinese history.

This, then, is the image I am confronting here—that time in the nineteenth century when, like that Chinese dancer on the stage, the immense historical totality of Chinese Civilization began slipping through its grasp.
Civilization from the Center

The Geomoral Context of Tributary Expectations

Our Illustrious Ancestor taught us
To bring the people near, and cast them not aside;
For the people are the root of the kingdom:
With the root firm, the kingdom is tranquil.
Classic of Documents

And, as it is with this, so too with all things.
The pages of our lives are blurred palimpsest:
New lines are wreathed on old lines half-erased,
And those on older still; and so forever.
The old shines through the new, and colors it.
Conrad Aiken, “Palimpsest”

During most of the long and expansive rule of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), Japan remained a largely inaccessible island kingdom on the eastern reaches of the Chinese world—the land of Riben, where the sun took root. Within the extensive array of tributary domains offering obeisance to the celestial Qing emperors, Japan was silent—physically absent from the imperial court, yet persistently present within All-under-Heaven. This ongoing abstention from official communication with the Qing court was one major consequence of Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu’s policy of “locking up” Japan in the 1630s, and putting Riben—what the Japanese themselves called “Nihon”—out of reach of Qing military might and administrative influence. To most Chinese, Japan endured as an inaccessible silence for over two hundred years.

Accordingly, in the most comprehensive and most widely read geographic anthology of the nineteenth century, Wei Yuan’s Illustrated Treatise on the Sea Kingdoms, Japan was simply appended to the section on the Nan Yang, or “Southern Sea”—that is, the island kingdoms of maritime Asia, which included the Philippines, Borneo, Java, and Sumatra. Japan was appended—and not featured in the formal enumeration—because it
was not among the official tributary kingdoms. Nevertheless, Japan retained its place on Chinese maps, because it still lay there, as it had for centuries, just off the coast of Civilization. In the nineteenth century, it took on added significance to Wei and other Chinese who saw Japan as a potential target of Western encroachment.1

Incidents of Western aggression and the violent events sparked in their wake ensued with alarming speed by the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1839 Great Britain provoked the first of the Opium Wars in south China. In 1851 the Taiping rebels began their fourteen-year rampage that devastated much of China south of the Yangze River. In 1853 Commodore Perry and his “Black Ships” demanded forcibly that Japan open its ports to American traders. By 1858 the second series of Opium Wars were under way in China, and calls for administrative reform and study of Western science and armaments were thereafter officially supported by the “Foreign Affairs Clique” at court; so began the Tongzhi Restoration. In 1868 the Meiji Restoration was proclaimed in Japan—a curious “revival of ancient ways” that overthrew the ruling Tokugawa shogunate, restored the emperor, and quickly turned into a wide-ranging program of “civilization and enlightenment” according to Western models. With the world of East Asia thus forced into the “international community,” China and Japan were brought closer to reestablishing official contact. The conduct of this relationship, however, was to be hotly contested from the start.

Because Chinese policies had begun to change by 1870, when Japan requested a treaty of trade and friendship, consensus was lacking among Chinese officials advising the court on its dealings with Japan. A number of officials—certainly the most illustrious—continued to consider Japan in the terms of the long-standing diplomacy of tributary relations, “Civilization” and “proximity.” But others were willing to consider Japan in light of the newer practice of international treaties, to which the Chinese court had committed itself in its relations with the Westerners. The problem faced by both positions, I will demonstrate in this chapter, is that they were informed by the legacy of Chinese writings on Japan, which remained quite inadequate during the first two centuries of Qing rule. The question thus arises: What was the state of Chinese knowledge of Japan by 1870, and how did it inform Chinese diplomacy both in that year, when Japan requested a treaty, and in 1874, when a conflict over Taiwan delayed the projected exchange of ambassadors between China and Japan?

Civilization and Proximity

Civilization, or wenming to the educated Chinese class in the nineteenth century, ultimately signified the expansive process of Chinese imperial lordship. In part, “wenming” meant “clarifying” or “enlightening—through-patterning.” One patterned the world and thus ruled it, with the assistance of a largely civil bureaucracy staffed by literati ideally entrusted to spread enlightened virtue throughout the realm. In explicit contrast to the rule of military subjugation (wugong), this active administering, termed “wenhua” (“transforming by patterning” or “civilizing”), was accomplished in the name of the emperor, or “Son of Heaven,” whose direct access to the clarity of the heavenly bodies made him the exemplar of illustrious virtue and guaranteed that the regularity of Heaven might be manifested in an analogous regularity of human life on earth. Because the basis for such virtuous example was provided by the set of histories and classics—the latter the putative writings of the ancient sages—writing was thus understood to be the quintessential patterning of Civilization, and we may further understand wenming as “enlightening through writing.” In other words, wenming described quite literally a superior state of human society made luminous (ming) through writing or civilization (wen); when all was at peace in the world, the world was wenming. A man’s knowledge of the received texts and their language, which was demonstrated as virtuous behavior in accordance with the very recommendations of the texts, meant that he too was wenming, or “civilizing.”2

Implicit in the bookishness of this Chinese conception of Civilization was an encouragement of historical analogy as a primary method of reasoning about man in the world. To the degree that one understood how the world was to be patterned after the writing of the classics, one could proceed to regulate human agency in the world. Analogical knowledge of the human world concentrated on human behavior, which was marked in terms of “lordship” (jun) and specified analogically as the reciprocal positions of the Confucian “Three Bonds”: the ruler–servant, father–son, and husband–wife relations. To pattern one’s behavior after the models provided by the classics, specifically indicated by properly submitting to one’s rightful lord, was to be among the “civilizing.” Those who did not display such behavior comprised the various ranks of the uncivilized; if the “black-haired masses” of Chinese subjects at least benefited from the example of
local officials and scholars, the outsiders, the rudest of whom made no ritual attempt to acknowledge the universal sovereignty of the Chinese emperor, lived in a wilderness beyond the border of recognition. 5

Civilization was, accordingly, a spatially expansive and ideologically infinite project. From the point of view of the emperor at the center, the realm was instantiated by the establishment of regional and local bureaucratic offices, by the voyages of imperial envoys to and from the emperor’s capital, and by the foreign envoys who came to call. In time, and assuming that imperial virtue shone forth, distant outsiders too would understand the Chinese classics and take a place within the civilizing realm. When outsiders did participate in Civilization, as when they sent tribute missions to the imperial court, they wrote in the literary Chinese language, expressing the decorous and submissive sentiments proper to their station. Literati in Korea, Vietnam, Japan, and other kingdoms became fluent in literary Chinese, and Chinese officials thus included those peoples within Civilization. 4

In this context of diplomacy, and in reference to these nearby east Asian nations, Chinese officials had recourse to the ancient concept of “proximity” (jin). More a correlative than a causal concept, proximity proposed a connection between space and morality: humankind would approximate moral behavior in proportion to their proximity to the moral rule of the Chinese emperor. This understanding of the world was fostered by the texts of Confucianism, and it assumed the expressly hierarchical world noted above. In the ancient Classic of Documents, the legendary founder of Chinese Civilization, the Great Yu (or Illustrious Ancestor), is lauded first for his paternal manner of rule, bringing the people close, or cherishing them (3.3). Other early formulations underlie this confusion between nearness in space and appropriateness in moral behavior; most explicit perhaps is the statement attributed to Confucius in the Analects (6.8): “To be able to take one’s example from what is close at hand can be called the direction of reciprocity.” That is, if one treats others as one treats “oneself” (what is close at hand), one “follows the form” of reciprocity.

Diplomacy, in terms of traditional tributary relations, pursued the same ideal. 6 The emperor brought close the outside peoples, who, insofar as they appeared in the Chinese court and thereby participated in the moral action of reciprocity, acknowledged a minimal acceptance of Chinese Civilization—the nominal lordship of the Son of Heaven and his calendar. In return, the foreign lord was confirmed as ruler of his domain. Nevertheless, this was but one area within an all-encompassing system of rites, or propriety (li), which extended to dress, language, food, and so on, and constituted the cultural substance of Civilization. To the degree a foreign people participated in the totality of Civilization—above and beyond their participation in tributary protocol—they could be considered “Chinese.” The kingdom of Korea, for example, was so closely integrated into Chinese Civilization that its nominal status during much of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing periods was more akin to “adopted son” than outsider. 6 Japan, by contrast, had not been a consistent participant since the eighth century, and accordingly, when Japan requested a formal treaty with China in 1870, an intense debate arose among Chinese advisors as to the position of Japan within the order of Civilization. 7

But this view of an expanding realm embracing other peoples did not guarantee that outsiders would in fact participate in Civilization; Chinese texts promised an ideal scenario to which actual practice did not necessarily conform. The issue at hand, however, is not whether or not the ideological bookishness of the model discredits it as an adequate description of historical reality; rather, the present issue is how this textual model operated in the worldviews of historical agents in the 1870s and 1880s. 8

The Bounds of Diplomatic Protocol

Models, after all, are but guides to reality; and the assumption is patent false that an ideal scenario (or ideology) will fully comprehend social interactions, whether they are as elemental as two individuals sharing a language and culture or as complex as ruling classes of two distinct societies. Although Chinese Civilization provided an explanation for actual relations diverging from the text (in its worst form, conflict)—namely, that one or both of the parties was morally lacking in adherence to reciprocity—there was always the possibility that peoples at the borders of social configurations—be they subcultural groups, rural and urban communities, provinces, regions, or states—would be in a position to interact, simply because they strayed into contact with one another. In other words, when Chinese chose to describe relations with foreign peoples in terms of proximity, they were intending to ritualize, and thereby regularize before the act of en-
counter, the random contacts among people(s) who moved into the vicinity of each other. As Pierre Bourdieu has observed, ritual practice "always aims to facilitate passages and/or to authorize encounters between opposed orders." In the interests of regulating contact, Chinese interpreted the commonplace "nearness" between peoples in terms of proximity, an act that formally designated and officially sanctioned a relationship between those peoples.

This comprehensive (if compulsive) concern for ritual is one well-documented aspect of Chinese Civilization. On the ancient precedent of the three classics of ritual (the Li ji, Yi li, and Zhou li), it was the business of Chinese authorities—both heads of clans and emperors—to issue ritual precedents and regulations for members of the group subject to their respective authority. Although weddings, funerals, and ancestral sacrifices were of greatest general importance, ritual manuals presumed to cover the gamut of human behavior. Emperors, moreover, had rituals appropriate to their universal sphere—the Great Sacrifices to Heaven and Earth and the reception of foreign envoys. Yet as Angela Zhao reminds us, ritual was not simply its textual representation, but a performance that enacted or represented the knowledge of past organizations described in texts, coupled with those objects or people needed to demonstrate power in present reality.10

Given this dual orientation of ritual as written precedent and enacted performance, the interest among Chinese rulers to ritualize diplomacy, and thereby manage the power of foreign states, could be easily and injuriously frustrated, precisely because such encounters were most difficult to prescribe. Chinese demonstration of universal lordship in diplomatic ritual was a precarious undertaking, because a ritual performance, in spite of its express intention to contain the power of a foreign state, did not necessarily do so. Chinese were dependent upon foreigners to come to the imperial court, yet Chinese claims could appear quite preposterous to the foreign party (as with the British in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). During the "medieval" age in Japan (roughly 1200–1600), warlord leaders dismissed Chinese claims of universal lordship (especially after Mongolian attempts to invade Japan in 1273 and 1281), and as Japanese political order disintegrated in the sixteenth century, would-be Japanese rulers cynically took advantage of Chinese ritual protocol in attempts to garner their respective claims to lordship in Japan. This development was recorded with repugnance in the Ming History, especially because these Japanese supplicants were unable (or unwilling) to control the allegedly Japanese "Dwarf pirates" ravaging the Chinese coast, and later advisors to the Qing emperors inferred the lesson that Japan might best be left alone. The imperial "decision" to ignore a foreign power was, after all, a legitimate choice.

Unofficial Contacts in the Early Qing

This willingness of the early Qing emperors and their advisors to forgo official relations with Japan presents a striking contrast to Qing diplomacy with the southeastern kingdoms of Vietnam, Thailand, Java, Sumatra, and especially the Liuqiu (Ryukyu) Islands. Relations between the Qing court and the king of the Liuqiu Islands were maintained regularly; as the Qing emperors welcomed ambassadors and tribute missions from the Liuqius, Chinese coastal trade with the Liuqiu Islands flourished.11 But in the case of Japan, the early Manchu emperors were satisfied with occasional, unofficial diplomacy when mutual interests coincided—typically over trade issues. Evidence has been found in the Yongzheng emperor's Imperial Comments in Vermillion (Zbupi yuzhi) to demonstrate that both the Kangxi and the Yongzheng emperors carried on secret diplomacy with Japan. Hoping to forestall all potential problems with piracy, the Kangxi emperor banned sea travel in 1684; nonetheless, trade with Japan quickly increased eightfold. Consequently, when the official Li Xu memorialized the throne in 1700 to express concern for the safety of the seacoast, the Kangxi emperor ordered that Li arrange for the envoy Mai Ersen to visit Nagasaki in order to observe the Chinese trade with Japan. In 1715, the Japanese shogunate instituted a system of "official passes" (C: xinpei; J: shinpei) in an effort to reduce the quantity of unauthorized trade; this action caused problems in south China when disgruntled merchants complained that those merchants receiving the passes were guilty of sedition. In response, the Kangxi emperor confiscated all passes, effectively prohibiting all trade until he relented two years later. Problems with illicit trade and smuggling grew during the 1720s, until the governor of Zhejiang province, Li Wei, with the personal approval of the Yongzheng emperor, sent emissaries to explore the possibility of a more mutual supervision of ships. In 1729, Japanese officials returned a letter outlining their policies, which was for-
warded to the emperor and received his approval. Apparently, the problems were thereby solved.12

On the rare occasion, then, when Chinese traders or Japanese policies were a source of dissent in the empire, Chinese officials close to the court sought imperial intervention with Japanese officials in charge of Nagasaki trade. Nevertheless, these contacts between the Chinese court and Japanese officials—conducted in secret and outside of imperial ritual protocol, and never the result of Japanese tributary missions to China—neither developed into more sustained relations nor induced Chinese to take a greater interest in Japan. Indeed, they may have had the opposite effect. Alarmed by stories that Chinese subjects traveled surreptitiously to Japan for the purposes of teaching archery, military formations, Chinese rituals, and other sensitive matters, Governor Li Wei sought to enforce the Kangxi emperor's standing ban on sea travel by more strictly controlling the activities of merchants and all other Chinese in Japan. In 1728, he ruled that no Chinese when in Japan was allowed to leave the Chinese merchants' compound in Nagasaki for free travel or for any reason other than trading.13

By 1750, then, the year in which the newly “restored” Japanese state surprised Chinese officials with a request for a treaty of friendship and trade, the problem facing Chinese considerations of Japan was the glaring lack of Qing ritual precedents for Japan: in over two centuries, there had been no official contact.14 Accordingly, the Chinese debate would dwell on locating a precedent: should Japan be treated in accordance with the principle of proximity and after the example of tributary states like Korea and Vietnam, or should Japan be treated as a distant outsider and granted a ‘treaty, like the Western domains? The outcome of that debate, to which we turn shortly, was guided by the legacy of geographical knowledge informing Chinese scholars and officials about Japan in 1750.

Japan in the Qing Record

Imagine, if you will, what a Chinese scholar might have known about Japan in the years just before China resumed official relations with the Japanese. As a consequence of the first Opium War, Chinese-language works on geography had multiplied quickly in the decade of the 1840s.15

Although they were primarily intended to provide information on the Westerners, all of these geographies included sections on Japan, with the prominent exception of the first—Lin Zexu’s Treatise on the Four Continents (Si zhou zhi), published in 1843. This work was followed quickly by Karl Gützlaff’s Complete Illustrated Geography of the Myriad Nations (Wangguo di li quan tu ji) in 1843; the first and second editions of Wei Yuan’s Illustrated Treatise on the Sea Kingdoms, in 1844 and 1847 respectively; Robert Morrison’s Concise History of the Foreign Nations (Wai guo zhi lue) in 1847; a Geographical Reference (Dili bei kao) by a Portuguese “Ma Jishi” (“Marques?”) also in 1847 and R. Q. Way’s Survey of Geography (Dili shuo lue) in 1848.16 The geography second in importance to that of Wei Yuan appeared in 1849; this was Xu Jiyu’s Short Treatise on the Ocean Circuits (Ying huan zhi lue), parts of which Wei Yuan incorporated in his third edition of 1852.17

In this third edition of the Illustrated Treatise on the Sea Kingdoms, Wei collected the corresponding excerpts on Japan from most of the above works, as well as other well-known Chinese works, and a small number of still uncollated, rare titles. The following texts provide the sources for Wei’s section on Japan:18

1. The “Japan Biography” (Riben zhuo) in the Ming History (Ming zhi) [279]
2. A Treatise on Military Preparations (Wu bei zhi), by Mao Yuanji, a military strategist and poet of the late Ming [1621]
3. Classified Manuscripts of the Year “Guisi” (Quisi lei guo), by Yu Zhengde, a leading evidential research scholar of the early nineteenth century [383]
4. Recorded News of the Sea Kingdoms (Hai guo wenjian lue), by Chen Lunjiang, a sea traveler [1730]
5. The Illustrated World Geography (Kanyu tu shuo), by Ferdinand Verbiest, a Jesuit employed by the Kangxi emperor in the Imperial Office of Astronomy [1672]
6. The Qing Imperial Compendium (Huang Qing tong kao) [1772]19
7. A Brief Record of Macao (Aomen ji lue), by Yin Guangren and Zhang Rulin, a pair of customs officials in Macao in the mid-eighteenth century [1757]20
8. The Complete Illustrated Geography of the Myriad Nations (Wangguo di li quan tu ji), by Karl Gützlaff, a German missionary working in Hong Kong after the Opium War [1843]
9. Additional Notes from Chen District (Chunxiang zhi bi) by Dong Han, a seventeenth-century traveler and poet [1738]21

10. Encountering Japan

Civilization from the Center

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I should add that Wei reproduced excerpts from at least three additional works, which are integrated among the last two items above (Morrison and Xu Jiyu). Wei himself may have been working from fragments, since his excerpts differ from other versions of the three works. One of these is the celebrated early Qing scholar Huang Zongzi’s history of the Ming “pretenders,” Records of the Itinerant Court (Xing chao lu), which was banned as subversive in the eighteenth century; from it, Wei extracted fragments of a chapter on “rebel” efforts to secure military help from Japan. The other two sources are an obscure text by a Yuan dynasty official, Wang Yun, entitled A Brief Record of a Sea Voyage (Fan hai xiao lu), and the preeminent early Qing scholar Gu Yanwu’s massive seventeenth-century compendium on military geography, On the Gains and Ills of the Administrative Domains under Heaven (Tianxia jingguo lübing shu). Gu Yanwu’s work was printed for general circulation only in 1821 (and again in 1823), but in fact, it was this work that provided a model for the above geographic anthologies of the mid-nineteenth century. In a turn of events reminiscent of the “Dwarf pirate” scare of the sixteenth century, piracy along the south China coast resurfaced in the late Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns (1796–1820), a situation which renewed interest in military history and frontier and coastal defense. Following Gu, who collected geographic materials in the interest of informing his Chinese compatriots of the defense of China’s frontiers against invaders like the Manchus, Wei Yuan collected his materials for the Illustrated Treatise on the Sea Kingdoms in the interests of coastal defense against the Westerners.

Narratives: Dwarf Pirates and Treacherous Japanese

The observant reader of Wei’s materials on Japan would notice three characteristic types of writing concerning Japan. Two are historical narratives, the third an ethnographic description. Of the two narratives, one chronicles the proliferation, intensification, and ultimate suppression of the Japanese “Dwarf pirates” of the sixteenth century; the other recounts the beginnings, expansion, and ultimate demise of Christian proselytizing among the Japanese at the turn of the seventeenth century. For the former narratives painstakingly outline the numerous pirate alliances and invasions flourishing after 1547, and often end with the death of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the Dwarf abandonment of their invasion of Korea in 1598. The latter narratives much more briefly describe the efforts of Portuguese Catholics or Dutch Protestants in Japan and Taiwan respectively, and end with the anti-Christian massacres in Nagasaki and the establishment of exclusionary laws against Westerners in the early 1660s. Where the former are Chinese historical narratives, based on the many Ming and early Qing accounts of the Dwarf pirates, the latter likely represent the reports of European proselytizers and traders, and Chinese merchants. In other words, the genres of the two sets differ in that the Dwarf pirate narratives are segments from longer Chinese histories, while the anti-Christian narratives are excerpted from collections of much shorter pieces called “notes” (biji), a style of writing popular among evidential research scholars in the Qing period (see chapter 5).

Not surprisingly, both narratives attribute utterly negative characteristics to the Japanese. They are rapacious, cruel, cunning, and treacherous; in broader terms, they are a warlike, unlettered people. The compilers of the Ming History emphasize the duplicity in the behavior of the Dwarf pirates.

The Dwarf character is exceedingly cunning. They invariably carried on board their ships both local products from their native land and their weapons. They would put to sail and wait along the coast for an opportunity. If it came, they would brandish their weapons and attack, invading inland; if none came, they would display their local products, styling them “tribute to the Court.” In short, they were sometimes “tribute bearers,” and sometimes “pirates,” as it suited them.

The set of narratives concerning anti-Christian activity also highlights expressly devious devices of the Japanese. One repeated incident indicts Japanese authorities in Nagasaki, who inlaid a bronze cross into the threshold of the gates to the city so as to entrap and execute those believers who would deliberately avoid stepping on the cross. (Some versions add an image of the Christ on the cross.)

A critical difference between the two sets of narratives, however, is the
name by which the Japanese are known. The pejorative “Dwarfs” (Wo) or “Dwarf pirates” (Woku) is consistently used in the narratives concerning the sixteenth-century pirates. There is of course a historical precedent for this name; until the tenth century, Japan was known as the “Wo Kingdom” (Wo guo or Woku guo). While the name was probably not a deliberate pejorative prior to the Ming dynasty, it could be literally interpreted as “slave” or “peon.” Certainly, in the sixteenth century, Wo was recirculated for its pejorative effect—no doubt to indicate Chinese contempt for the illicit behavior of pirates, especially the Japanese variety. By contrast, “Japan” (Riben)—or its derivative, “Japanese”—is typically used in the set of anti-Christian narratives.

I propose two reasons for these distinctive practices. In the first place, “Dwarf” carries over from Ming Chinese usage, while “Japan” is the more established geographical usage of the Qing period. As I indicated earlier, the histories of the Dwarf pirates are based on Ming sources, while the “notes” on anti-Christian activity are strictly Qing writings. In the second place, the geographic content of the semantics of the two names is different. The “Dwarfs” are Japanese when they are outside of Japan and trespass into Chinese territory, while “Japan” is the Chinese geographical name for the land so signified and is the location of the anti-Christian activity perpetrated by Japanese against their own people.

Chen Lunjiang even questions whether the “Dwarf pirates” were truly “Dwarfs” from Japan:

The Dwarf pirates of the Jiajing period [1523–1567] were from Satsuma. When Japanese trading ships first sailed to Yongjia [in Zhejiang Province], eighteen Dwarf fishermen were driven by the winds to China, and certain adult characters induced them to participate in rebellious acts. [These Chinese] trimmed their beards and shaved their heads [like the Dwarfs], and bastardized their speech with dialect from some distant place, and thereupon [they all] collaborated in robbery and plunder. This gang was called the “Dwarf pirates,” but at the time they were apprehended, there were only eighteen [such Dwarfs].

Indeed, evidence in the accounts of Ming dynasty piracy would seem to support such a position, because the pirate leaders and prominent figures in the narratives are primarily Chinese. In order to strategically compensate for this straying from “Japan,” the narratives typically close with identifiably Japanese subjects. One frequent ending is Hideyoshi and his invasion of Korea; another (which appears in examples of both narratives) is the story of Zheng Chenggong (or Koxinga), son of a Chinese pirate and Japanese mother, who abandoned the Chinese mainland and established a Ming refuge in Taiwan, which was ultimately wiped out by the Qing armies in 1683. As Ralph Croizier has pointed out for the case of Koxinga, these endings serve to underline the consistency of historical events—from an imperial Qing perspective.

**Descriptions: Civil Japan**

The third format for writing about Japan is the more typical ethnographic description, which generally covers such points as the location of Japan, its type of administration, laws, customs, teachings, local products, and so on. If this approach is more prevalent, its details exhibit the most variation. There is no systematic ordering of information, and little is consistent aside from the often repeated introductory assertion that “Japan was known as the Dwarf [Wo] Kingdom in ancient times.”

Nevertheless, it is clear that above all, Chinese writers of these descriptions understood “Japan” as an administrative unit. In addition to whatever assortment of details, all texts make a point of this topic in one form or another. Several texts begin with the analysis that Japan “consists of five principalities, seven circuits, and three islands, which are altogether 135 departments encompassing 587 districts.” Another analysis mentions either thirty-six or seventy-two islands, each being an independent domain. In both cases, all mention that the Japanese are ruled by some combination of king, lord, or general (shōgun), and generally have the idea that there are two important administrative offices. Most state that there is a “dominal king” (guowang), who has either an empty or a ceremonial position, and a general, who is the focus of privilege and power. Others mention two kings who share the same functional division of ceremony and power: a “true” or “spirit” king, and a “secondary king.” Finally, some writers mention a group of lords who rule the various islands in the name of the king—akin to the ancient Zhou king’s “noble ranks.”

In these descriptions of Japan, the Dwarf people are presented much more congenially than in the historical narratives. They live amid mountains, rivers, and lakes; they produce gold, silver, hemp, wood, and silk; and manufacture lacquerware, bronze vessels, beautiful cloth, and exquisite...
swords. Their laws may be strict, but they are a well-mannered people; they honor the graves of their ancestors, keep their streets clean, believe in the teachings of the Buddha, and delight in poetry and the Chinese dynastic histories. They use the Chinese writing system; their dress resembles that of the ancient Tang style. Like the Chinese, they eat rice.43

These generally favorable assessments are possible, I believe, because of two kindred premises. In the first place, the Japanese are often said to be “similar to the Chinese” in these accounts. This characterization renders them much more sympathetic, because every point of resemblance to “the Chinese” is a moment at which the writer leaves the details of such resemblance to the imagination of his Chinese reader. To the reader aware of regional variations in China, Japan becomes a similar, albeit more distant, variation. In the second place, there is an order in these representations, one that would have been familiar and therefore reassuring to Chinese readers: Japan is subdivided into units that are in turn administered by a hierarchy of rulers. This class division patterns the Japanese after Chinese Civilization, especially in contrast to the disharmony represented in the narratives about the Dwarf pirates. These two favorable premises often combine in direct comparisons between Japan and China. For example, some texts complete the above analysis of Japan’s administration with a Chinese point of reference: “Japan consists of... 587 districts, all of which are bound by water and smaller islands; the largest does not exceed the size of a Chinese village.”44 Or again, Japanese government officials are said to “hold offices and stipends generation upon generation, honoring the Han dynasty system, the standard for which was one thousand stones of grain for the rank of district magistrate.”45 One text observes a truly favorable set of similarities with Chinese behavior: “In Izumi Province, the people ring a bell when meals are laid out, as in Chinese customs. The people of Oka hamlet in Satsuma understand propriety and righteousness, and regard law-breaking with gravity.”46

Whether or not Japanese are like Chinese, or even share Chinese ways, was an issue hotly contested when contact was renewed between the two peoples—as we shall see shortly. Only rarely do voices in the Qing record dissent from these positive assessments of the Japanese and recognize ways in which they unfavorably differ from China. Consistently, it is the European missionaries’ texts that devalue Japan, and do so on the basis of an awareness of the different social classes in Japanese society. Morrison, for example, comments on the shogun’s practice of keeping hostages in the capital and connects this to the general “haughtiness” of the lordly class.47 Gutzlaff notes the rigid divisions of privileges among classes, one result of which is that the common people fear their rulers; this is an unfortunate departure from the Chinese ideal of reverence or affection for one’s rulers. He also observes that the Japanese too often drink to excess and are sexually dissolute, with the entire land full of courtesans.48 Gutzlaff is as well the only one to declare: “The Japanese people are not similar to the Chinese people [the Han race]. Their facial appearance, bearing, and the sound of their speech are different [from Chinese]. Although they borrowed Chinese written characters and the ritual practices of Tang Chinese, their intentions and views are vastly different.”

Apart from these descriptions and narratives, Qing writings on Japan also include a few series of directions for Chinese wishing to sail to Japan. Chen Lunjiang locates Japan in units of geng, the two-hour watch, recording that such-and-such a place in Japan lies the distance traveled in so many geng from a given place in China. He is apparently the originator of this information, which is reproduced in the Qing Imperial Compendium and elsewhere. Chen adds further directions of questionably practical help, stating simply that a ship sailing from Amoy in south China, heading toward Jilong in Taiwan with a southerly wind, will continue to pass certain landmarks en route, depending on certain winds, and arrive in Nagasaki.49 Much more detailed directions are reproduced in Gu Yanwu’s On the Gains and Ills of the Administrative Domains under Heaven; most interesting is a quite technical set of directions in terms of “compass” points, evidence that Chinese knowledge of seafaring had early on situates Japan in an abstracted system of references.50 By comparison, Chinese were confused by the first European geographies in Chinese that introduced the latitude and longitude system, because they typically gave contradictory values for Japan. Wei Yuan’s Illustrated Treatise on the Sea Kingdoms includes two versions, one in the Dili bei kao and one by Morrison; Wei notes at the end of his section on Japan that the English outsiders in Hong Kong offer misinformation as knowledge—since they have never personally gone to Japan, their mapping system is not to be trusted.51

Given this preponderance of received knowledge, based not on current, first-hand accounts of Japan but on conventional narratives and descrip-
tions of Japan one or more centuries old, it is not surprising that by the
time of China's awkward entry into the "international order," anyone deal-
ing with Japan inevitably relied on "facts" and incidents only distantly
bearing upon the contemporary era. Since scholars had for so long been
unable to verify what they had heard and read, this general ignorance of
Japan created two related difficulties. On the one hand, scholars or officials
interested in Japan were confronted by a host of received "facts" that often
conflicted with each other; one couldn't tell if the Japanese were treach-
erous Dwarf pirates or a people patterned after Chinese Civilization. On
the other hand, when officials had occasion to formulate political recom-
mandations on the basis of these received "facts," their opponents ex-
plotted the dissonance between textual representations from the past and
the contemporary world of action. It is the effects of this received knowl-
edge in the activity of diplomacy to which we shortly turn.

An Aside: The Aborted Legacy of the Ming

The scarcity between 1640 and 1840 of information concerning contem-
orary Japan is remarkable, when compared to the number of writings com-
pleted by the end of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Scholars commonly
interpret this output of the late Ming in terms of need and practicality;
these writings on Japan were directly prompted by the widespread problem
of Japanese Dwarf pirates. The appearance of works like the Japan Inves-
tigations (Riben ka) by Li Xingong, printed in 1575, is explained as evi-
dence of the effort to better understand Japanese character and conditions
in order to more effectively suppress the Dwarf pirate raids of the time.52

The most significant fact about these writings is that Ming scholars
created an unprecedented set of monographs on Japan. Quite unlike the
standard narrative "Japan Biography" in the official dynastic histories,
these works treat Japan as the individual object of an independent history.
The works constituting this history were produced largely between the
1520s and the 1620s; the first among them was Xue Jun's Concise Investiga-
tions of Japan (Riben kao lue), published in 1523. Xue initially reiterates
the widespread Ming perception that the Dwarfs are cunning and devious
barbarians against whom China must defend herself, but he then offers a
quite detailed analysis of Japan. His analysis proceeds according to what
became a standard geographical representation during the Qing period
(see chapters 3 and 5 on local treatises) and is divided into the following
categorizations: successive administrative changes (yan'ge), borders, prov-
inces and prefectures, tributary domains, mountains and rivers, local prod-
ucts, dynastic records, population, regulations, customs, history of tribute
to the Chinese court, tribute items, pirates, and writing. These "concise
investigations" are followed by a series of poems on memorable Japanese
sites, events, and persons; and the work ends with a lengthy and fascinat-
ing list of Japanese "transmitted vocabulary" (jiyu) items, each of which is
the reputed sound of a Japanese word or phrase, phonically transliterated
into Chinese characters, and accompanied by a Chinese (character) translation.
(There is no written Japanese.)52

None of these Ming works received any sustained attention during the
Qing dynasty. Quite apart from the issue of the need to understand Japan
and the fact that these texts were not widely reprinted, this nascent Ming
discourse on Japan was "aborted" primarily as a result of a significant
shift in scholarly sensibilities. When the Qianlong emperor commissioned
the massive encyclopedic collection of texts that came to be known as The
Complete Books of the Four Treasuries (Siku quanshu), his eighteenth-
century editors considered only three of these texts on Japan for inclusion
among geographic works: the two works by Li Xingong and Xue Jun men-
tioned above, and one other, the Illustrated Compendium on Japan (Riben tu
zuan), attributed to Zheng Ruoceng. All three received less than satisfac-
tory evaluations. The editors reported that Li had gathered his informa-
tion in the process of combating pirates and had simply written down what
he had heard. Zheng, they reported, had interviewed merchants who had
traded in Nagasaki and recorded errors and truths indiscriminately. Xue,
by contrast, had interviewed Japanese officials bearing tribute to the Chi-
nese court and had had the opportunity to differentiate the true from the
false; nevertheless, errors remained in his account.53 None of the works
were included in the final edition of the Four Treasuries, and all fell into
obsccurity. If Zheng's work alone had an audience, it was known through
the larger work from which it was excerpted, the Illustrated Collection on
Coastal Defense (Chou hai tu bian), attributed to Hu Zongxian.54

Although the "investigation" remained a significant genre of critical
history and geography during the Qing period, no further monographs
devoted to Japan were produced until the 1870s. In spite of this hiatus of
three centuries or more, there is a remarkable parallel between the production of works on Japan between 1520 and 1590 and the resurgence of works on Japan in the 1870s and 1880s (the subject of chapters 3, 4, and 5): conflict with Japan inspired some Chinese to develop a better understanding of their neighbor across the sea.

The Matter of International Treaties

By 1870, the Chinese ruling class had encountered an exceptional series of foreign challenges that questioned the veracity of the model of Civilization. The Westerners waged war upon the realm over the right to import opium; they understood nothing of virtuous conduct. Worse, they simply were not interested in Civilization; and the alternative world they proposed, an international order in which sovereign powers were differentiated and equal, threatened to subvert the very essence of Civilization—the literary Chinese language, the Confucian classics, and the Chinese emperor. The Westerners would not go away; neither could they be ignored, dismissed, or left to their recalcitrant immorality. By 1870, many among the ruling class were struggling to reach some ideological mediation of the two opposed, if not antagonistic, positions.

Although Wei Yuan’s readers in 1832 had indications from Morrison that English and Americans had begun contacting the Japanese as early as 1837, news of current affairs in Japan was not widely available for a few decades. As reports of Japanese success at copying Western technology were brought to China by Western travelers and diplomats, Chinese literary made increasingly substantive mentions of Japan in their writings—with particular reference to China’s own efforts at Westernization. Both those officials who would strengthen China with Western armaments (so-called self-strengtheners), and those who would modify Chinese administrative institutions so as to effect some integration of Chinese and Western learning (so-called reformers), used Japan as a point of comparison in their efforts to impress upon the Qing court the urgency of building “strong ships and effective guns.” Chinese attention was caught—and jarsingly so—by the Meiji Restoration of 1868, and several scholars and officials made much of the fact that Japan had quickly managed to build its own iron foundries and steamships so as to return diplomatic visits to the United States and Europe. In feeling such dissonance between the activities of the “small domain” of Japan and the hesitation of “great” China, some even suggested that China follow the example of Japan.

The issue at the heart of these evaluations and comparisons of Westernizing change in China and Japan was whether or not Civilization could accommodate Westernization—both the technology of weapons and industry as well as the diplomatic practice of creating treaties. A minority insisted that all elements of Westernization were heretical and threatened to destroy the very fabric of China’s relations with its nearby neighbors, if not Chinese society altogether. As we will see, this group of officials rejected Japan’s request for a treaty in 1870. Other officials, however, inclined toward a more positive assessment; many had grown to accept the treaty system as a part of Civilization, but remained ambivalent about Western industry and social forms. Zuo Zongtang, for example, declares that Japan was foreign and thus beyond the borders of Civilization; like the other Westerners, Zuo maintained, Japan’s interest in Western technology was based on the same immoral act of mistaking superfluous mechanical details for fundamental principles of virtue. But in the same way that Chinese protocol could accommodate a new treaty system—making it effectively a component of Civilization—Zuo believed that China could accommodate practical matters like the industrial production of ships and guns. Because both outsiders and Chinese were human beings, Chinese were inherently capable of placing increased emphasis on mechanical details and thereby producing competitive ships. In other words, Zuo displaced the quality of sameness to the more universal category of human being, which was securely grounded within Civilization. Implicitly, however, Zuo deferred the day that Chinese Civilization reasserted its preeminence over the West and Japan, and accordingly, his understanding acknowledged a weakness of Civilization—China was neither practical nor strong enough, and would have to become so if Chinese Civilization were to survive.

A third group of scholars, by comparison, were similarly accepting of Westernization and also believed that Japan was still within the Chinese domain of Civilization. Scholars like Peng Guifen, Wang Tao, and Li Hongzhang acknowledged with Zuo Zongtang that the new diplomatic protocol was properly part of Civilization, but these men went further than Zuo when they imagined China incorporating much more Westernization. In urging the court not only to follow the example of Japan, but
also to sign a treaty with Japan, such scholars imagined more porous boundaries to Civilization, and their view, I will argue, included the possibility of actively renegotiating the relationship between Civilization and Westernization.

What is suggestive about these attitudes is that acceptance of Westernization began with treaties—legal documents grounded in an alternative ritual of diplomacy. Although much has been made of China’s “unequal treaties” after the Opium War, the making of international treaties was not new to China in the nineteenth century. As Joseph Fletcher has shown, the Qing emperors signed several treaties with the czar of Russia as well as with Moslem kingdoms in central Asia. Chinese treaties with Russia, beginning with the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689, were in part the work of European Jesuit advisors, and were explicitly agreements between equals; the Kangxi emperor reasoned that Russia was so vast and so far away that the czar could be acknowledged to possess an equivalent status. But this magnanimity in the early Qing was no longer available in the nineteenth century. According to Fletcher, who describes the Chinese treaty with the Moslem khan of Kokand in 1839 as the first “unequal” treaty, the Daoguang emperor was willing to relinquish his claim to the revenues from customs and commercial taxation in Altishahr (Xinjiang) in return for a cessation of hostilities in the area. That this treaty was perhaps less than honorable may explain why it was omitted from the otherwise complete “Veritable Court Records” of the activities of the court. In other words, in addition to both the traditional tributary ritual described above and the occasional practice of unofficial contact, the Manchu emperors of the Qing dynasty employed a third alternative in managing foreign relations, the international treaty, but the status of this practice changed greatly between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The violence of the Opium Wars in 1839 and 1858 soured many Chinese attitudes toward the Westerners and their practice of international treaties, because, repeatedly, the foreigners forced China to agree to treaties that in practice not only contradicted their pretense of equality but also subverted Chinese superiority.

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that some Chinese officials were in time encouraged to begin to take this treaty arrangement seriously. This was, I believe, because such an ordering of the world did promise to empower all nations to treat each other as equals according to the strict provisions of these mutual agreements. It was precisely this emergent “universalism” reflected in the practice of treaties and their promise of mutuality and equality that legitimized such arrangements to Chinese proponents. That is to say, to some Chinese, an implicit universalism bridged the traditional and Western approaches to diplomacy. Both the notion of proximity and the practice of treaties promised universal order, although each vision of universality was structured quite differently. While Civilization imagined a universal unity hierarchized under the person of the Chinese emperor, the universality posed by an international order of sovereign states was that of equality—an equality that not only necessitated differentiation, but made a virtue of it. Accordingly, when Japan’s Ambassador Yanagihara began by claiming that “Civilization had changed” and “near and far had ceased to be,” he was giving voice to the new Western universalism, which to some promised a new international order, but to others threatened to subvert traditional Chinese diplomacy, and Chinese Civilization altogether.

The Decision to Grant Japan a Treaty (1870)

To express their interest in normalizing Japan’s relations with the Chinese empire, in the manner of already “normalized” relations with the Western powers, Japanese authorities of the new Meiji state sent Ambassador Yanagihara Sakimatsu to Tianjin in September 1870 to petition Chinese authorities with an official Japanese request for a joint treaty of friendship and trade. Yanagihara’s letter reasoned that “recent changes in Civilization had unfolded in great measure,” and that “paths to international communications were multiplying daily, so that near and far had ceased to be”; since Japan had recently signed trade agreements with the Western nations, she would like to do the same with her closest neighbor, China. Japan’s request was regarded favorably by Chenglin, the northern superintendent of trade, who had received Yanagihara in Tianjin. In reporting the matter up to the court, both Chenglin and his superior at the International Office, Prince Gong, proceeded cautiously in advising the court. Both expressed sympathy with the good intentions of Japan. Prince Gong drew particular attention to the proximity of Japan, evident in Japan’s skill with Chinese writing, and noted that because Japan too had born the mistreatment of the West, China should show solidarity by
cooperating with her sole eastern neighbor. But he advised against signing a treaty; he saw no need—Japan could simply petition the court and request permission to trade with China. The Japanese ambassador, however, aware that such a move would encourage Chinese claims to superiority, insisted. In the ensuing debate over whether or not to establish a treaty with Japan, the governor of Anhui, Ying Han, condemned the proposed treaty; Ying's points were refuted by the two most celebrated officials credited with the recent suppression of the Taiping rebels and the "self-strengthening" reforms, Li Hongzhang and Zeng Guofan.

The argument engaged conflicting interpretations of Chinese and Japanese relations in the past. Because the imperial court had always been the Chinese institution managing foreign affairs, and because proper relations were instantiated by proper ritual behavior, a consideration of contact with Japan turned immediately to the question of historical precedents. Specifically, the issue was whether Japan should be considered a Chinese dependency (tukuo), a tributary domain (chaozhi guo), or neither. Corollary to this dispute was an argument over the moral nature and intentions of the Japanese. What attitude befitted their status? To Ying Han, the Japanese were like other outside domains—"having the nature of dogs and sheep." That is, they made their plans in terms of profit and threatened others in terms of might. Worse, Japan was none other than the "Dwarf Kingdom" of old, whose "Dwarf pirates" had been responsible for "the two hundred years of calamity" affecting the Chinese coast during the Ming dynasty. They plotted secretly; their manner was condescending. And unlike England or France, with whom China had granted treaties, the Dwarfs had always been a servant and tributary domain; hence their request was without propriety and should be spurned. Otherwise, a dangerous precedent might result, and China would find its other dependancies requesting treaties. In other words, Ying Han analyzed the situation as a long-standing Japanese transgression against the ancient principle of proximity: Japan's immorality corresponded to her violations of tributary expectations.

In response, Li Hongzhang acknowledged that Japan was the former Dwarf Kingdom, but pointed out that they had stopped sending tribute after the time of the Yuan dynasty founder, Kubilai Khan. Even if they had once been a tributary domain, they had never been a dependency, and therefore, could not be classed with Korea, the Liuqiu Islands, or Vietnam. Some might say that the Dwarf pirate problem during the Ming had arisen because of the "cunning" nature of the Dwarfs, but Li insisted that the problem was due to the harmful Ming policy of restricting Chinese trade with Japan. As further support for his claim that the Japanese nature was benign, Li pointed out that Japan had never taken advantage of China during either the Taiping problem or the recent wartime troubles of 1860–1861. Zeng Guofan reiterated many of Li's points and, furthermore, denied emphatically that the Japanese had any intention apart from a desire for a trade agreement. Zeng saw no harm in giving Japan the treaty she wanted, but urged the court to specify Japan's privileges under the treaty rather than grant Japan the customary most-favored-nation status. Both Li and Zeng were especially concerned to contain the issue; they sought to avoid the possibility that Japan might turn to the Western nations for help and "introductions" on this matter and thereby create complications. At the same time, they took the opportunity to advocate further self-strengthening measures, urging the court to send ambassadors and observers to Japan, so as to learn from Japan's Westernizing changes. The judgment of Li and Zeng prevailed, and a treaty was ratified in 1874 to take effect in 1873.

These two attitudes toward contacts with Japan persisted at least through the first two decades of resumed official relations. If the precedent established by Li and Zeng carried greater weight, adherents of the opposing view continued to raise similar protests on historical grounds. I would characterize the former attitude as a "legalistic pragmatism," insofar as this group of Chinese officials took Japanese claims and requests at face value and attempted to formulate solutions to misunderstandings and diplomatic problems on the basis of the terms of the friendship treaty. Although one can identify a background of such adherence to law in China, traceable through codes of law to the ancient legalist philosophers, what especially distinguishes these men in the nineteenth century is their capacity to imagine a new history for Chinese and Japanese relations. By contrast, the latter attitude might be considered an "idealistic historicism," in that this group of Chinese officials compared the present to past accounts with the understanding that the received imperial history not only provided standards for Civilization that had to be maintained in the present but also assigned to Japan a predetermined rank and moral expectations, both of which the Japanese had spurned in more recent history. The present Japa-
inese were the descendants of the Dwarf pirates and, as such, had treacherously abandoned Civilization. These men are often referred to as reactionaries or xenophobes, but again, I am especially struck by their rigid adherence to an ideal Confucian interpretation of Civilization.

Be that as it may, these designations of "pragmatic" and "historicism" are in the end heuristic devices, because all of these officials were historicists insofar as they were all informed by—but gave different weight to—the received history. The "pragmatic" officials all rejected any present pertinence of the narratives of Dwarfish treachery, and some among them noted the optimistic descriptions of a civilized Japan. By contrast, "historicism" officials could not look beyond the Dwarf pirate narratives, which provided damning evidence of past Japanese failures to maintain civilized standards. In other words, we have here a pair of alternative readings of the received history on Japan, and thus a pair of alternative understandings of Japan's relationship of proximity to Chinese Civilization. Where "historicism" gave precedence to Japan's tributary relation to the Chinese court, the "pragmatists" instead gave priority to Japan's filiation to certain cultural attributes of Civilization. But these two attitudes were not mutually exclusive, and I am not suggesting that Chinese officials can be classified as one type or the other. Individuals evaluated the historical narratives and descriptions differently and inconsistently when they constructed their criteria for the present. Indeed, the fact that certain "historicism" accepted the legitimacy of the treaty with Japan after it was signed is a significant indication of the degree to which Chinese perceptions of foreign relations continued to change after the second Opium War.

Ultimately, the debate in 1870 alerts us to a fracture in the notion of proximity, a new disjunction between its spatial and moral attributes. When Zeng Guofan, speaking for the "pragmatists", observed that "the Japanese are familiar with the incidents of the past [i.e., Kubilai Khan's ruined efforts to invade Japan], so rather than fear us, they simply call us their neighbor," he asserted that geographical proximity invited diplomatic relations on the model of a treaty.68 His observation, however, did not assuage "historicism" concerns, because "historicism" officials took that brazen assertion of neighborliness as proof of their claims that the Japanese Dwarfs were wanting in honesty and propriety. Proximity, to their understanding, demanded moral submission and tributary ritual rather than any treaty arrangement. In other words, Japan's request in 1870 had the consequence of placing Japan squarely in an ambivalent position: neither as distant and different as the Westerners, nor as close and commensurate as China's dependencies. Indeed, much of this study is an investigation of the working out of that ambivalence in the 1870s and eighties.

Japanese Incident/Dwarf Intrusion (1874)

The story of Chinese and Japanese relations in the last three decades of the nineteenth century is most often a story of deliberate Japanese hostility toward China, from acts intended to detach intermediate lands like the Liuqiu Islands and Korea from Chinese tributary relations, to the invasion and annexation of Chinese territories.69 It is not my purpose here to retell or to contest this story. Rather, I am interested in a certain style of argument, the "historicist" argument, that was repeatedly used in discussions of Japan. As Chinese became more knowledgeable in international law and more accustomed to the ways of international diplomacy, they became better able to defend the empire in those terms. And yet some scholars continued to take the "historicist" position described above, producing policy statements that elaborately shuffled arguments and points of view, and persistently refused to relinquish the Dwarf pirate narrative.

An instructive case is provided by the furor over what came to be known as the Taiwan Incident of 1874. In what Chinese felt was an act of utter contempt for the friendship treaty, a Japanese expedition headed by Saigo Tsugumichi invaded Taiwan in order to punish certain Taiwanese aborigines who had earlier killed some Liuqiu islanders when the latter had inadvertently fished Taiwanese waters. The Japanese claimed that because the Liuqiu Islanders were Japanese citizens and because China had taken no measures to punish the aggressors or compensate the victims, Japan's own army was justified in seeking direct recourse. This developed into a major international incident: European ships patrolled the Taiwan coast to observe developments, and the British ambassador to China, Sir Thomas Wade, volunteered to mediate the dispute. In the end, Japan received an indemnity and strengthened its claim over the Liuqiuis.70 As we might expect, the more "pragmatic" position throughout the crisis, exemplified again by Prince Gong and Li Hongzhang, was to turn to the treaty for standards of behavior. Their memorials to the court repeat the need to "act
according to the treaty”; their official communiqués to Japanese officials reiterate their ultimately ineffectual protests that Japan has failed to act in accordance with either the treaty or recent official negotiations. By contrast, and in the spirit of Ying Han’s case against establishing a treaty with Japan, “historicist” arguments condemning Japan’s conduct in Taiwan make much of historical evidence. They begin by rehearsing the history of Dwarf and Japanese tribute missions to China, which were documented from the Wei through the Song dynasties—that is, the third through twelfth centuries—but ceased with the Yuan (1279–1368) and were resumed only intermittently during the Ming period. After citing these ritual precedents for Japanese submission to China, “historicist” officials typically recall the Dwarf pirate problem during the Ming dynasty, which culminated in the Dwarf invasion of Korea in 1592. Their most significant source of information was the “Japan Biography” in the Ming History; in fact, the Investigation of the Eastern Dwarfs, a discussion of the Taiwan incident written by Jin Anqiong around 1875, incorporates those sections of the “Japan Biography” concerned with pirate raids after 1592 under the leadership of Wang Zhi. Through this use of historical evidence, Jin and his colleagues establish what turns out to be a circular argument. First, the Dwarfs were a “cunning” and “treacherous” people, and thus unwilling and unable to act according to Civilized moral principles. Second, because Japan had long been China’s tributary domain, and then co-signer of a friendship treaty, she had in recent actions violated all established order between herself and the Chinese court. To bring the argument full circle, Japan had violated established order because, as Dwarfs, Japanese did not act according to principle. What is fascinating about this argument is the way in which it entwines not only a history of Dwarfs with a history of Japan, but also a history of tributary ceremony with a history of treaty relations, so as to recommend that China go to war with Japan.

An extended example will illustrate the logical procedures in this argument. The Notes on the Recent Japanese Incident, written by Chen Qiyan around 1875, begins by describing the “laughfulness” of the Dwarfs since the time Kubilai Khan failed to invade Japan, and then turns to the “viciousness” of the Dwarf pirates during the Ming. To emphasize Japan’s disregard for the righteous precedents of their own forebears, he reproduces the Wei emperor Ming Di’s decree to the “original!” Dwarf tribute mission sent allegedly by Jingó Kōgō in 239. The Wei emperor commends the Dwarf queen for her loyalty and filiality, and bestows upon her both the epithet “Friend of Wei” and a sizeable collection of gifts. Chen establishes the connection to the present incident when he concludes:

In truth, it can be seen that our nation-family calls together the distant peoples in kindness and conciliation, and across the expanse of a common Heaven. Yet, in the thirteenth year of Tongzhi [1874], Japan took the Taiwan aborigines’ killing of Liuqiu islanders as cause to command a sortie of several thousand troops into Taiwanese territory, set up base camps, construct fortifications, and wage war against the aborigines. Who could have foreseen this covert intention?

Implicit in Chen’s argument are two corollary beliefs. First, Chen intimates that although something had gone awry in the thirteenth century, earlier arrangements between China and Japan should be recoverable. And second, these arrangements should be recoverable because they had an origin in righteous intent. Now, we today would likely credit Japanese leaders with a decision to forgo Japanese tributary missions to China (indeed, Chinese scholars toward the end of the nineteenth century blamed the establishment of a non-Chinese dynasty under Mongol domination in 1279), but scholars like Chen in the 1870s attributed the break in relations between China and Japan to the failure of Kubilai Khan’s planned invasion of Japan, which they described as a “legitimate punitive expedition” in retaliation for Japan’s assassination of the Chinese envoy in 1276. Chen and Jin noted that the inept leadership of the surrendered Soong general Pan Wenhu had sabotaged the expedition, but critical fault for the break in relations must be placed on Japan, because imperial intent was in accord with Heaven, and Heaven had earlier brought Dwarf tribute missions to the Chinese court. This was the natural order implicit in Civilization, and Chen, Jin, and others could not consider a reversal of this hierarchical model.

By implication, the Japanese must have lost a measure of virtue during the intervening eras, and Chen confirms this when he discloses the “covert intention” of the Japanese in Taiwan. He goes even further when he recounts his dissatisfaction with the solution to the Taiwan Incident, and sarcastically questions the basic humanity of a people that would be appeased by monetary retribution for the deaths of their fellows: “Two Dwarfs were pleased to receive our compensation, thereby alleviating their sorry burden; they considered the situation remedied and returned to

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Japan, even though the number of dead among their forces was considerable." This overriding purpose of attributing a base character to the Dwarfs is, I believe, the reason why "historical" arguments make use of the Dwarf pirate raids of the sixteenth century. As Dwarfs, the Japanese lack virtuous intent. In this respect, Jin Anqing's careful analysis of Japanese foreign trade expansion after the 1840s and the consequent collapse of the shogunate is indicative; Jin details the tremendous profit earned by the shogun, and implies that his improper intention led to his downfall in 1868.77

The remainder of Chen's essay is the text of a memorial that he and Ying Baoshi, provincial administration commissioner of Jiangsu, wrote to the emperor and sent by way of Zhang Shusheng, provincial governor of Jiangsu. (The memorial, to my knowledge, has never been reported to have reached the emperor.) The text begins with a similar castigation of the base intentions of the Dwarfs, in language evocative of the "Japan Biography" in the Ming History:

Japan is alone in the eastern sea, and lies very close to China. Their people are accustomed to deception of a great many sorts, and quite simply lack honesty and righteousness. Recently, they imitate the ways of Westerners in everything; they indulge in wild thoughts of self-strengthening, and secretly design to expand their territory. In sum, their intentions are underhanded—how long have they plotted so willfully?78

Chen and Ying expand on this reasoning by bringing in the matter of the treaty, which, we see, has been subverted in a larger web of cunning intentions:

Today, they spurn treaties and start wars, giving excuses as they provoke other states; they force their way into our borders, massacring our aboriginal peoples. China desires to maintain old relations, and to get along with others on the basis of principles. How could we unashamedly use military force—or even permit such use? That we build watchtowers could be said to exemplify extreme generosity and to celebrate propriety and righteousness—they are an expression of how we protect their trading ships. But who could have fathomed their cunning plots? Even as they tell us with empty words, they have already long occupied aboriginal shrines and coerced the aborigines over to their side.79

Criticism of Japan is inseparably ethical and cultural, based on the notion of proximity. Japan lies close across the eastern sea; Japan may know Chinese ways but it has forsaken them, and consequently its invasion of Taiwan is proof of unprincipled and barbarian behavior. The damnable act here is disclosed in the projection "How could one use military force?" Chinese modes of action are predicated on modeling—one imitates the good example of better others. What Japan lacks, honesty and righteousness, is what China offers. That an established set of behaviors deserves imitation is implicit in China's "desire to maintain old relations." China would not use military force so provocatively, nor sanction such activity—the implication remains, "How could Japan?" In the tautological simplicity of the piece, Japan has ceased to follow the good example of China—because it has perversely declined to do so. Where China's military defenses express paternalistic concern, and give evidence of generosity, propriety, and righteousness, Japanese munitions become a sign of their devious plotting. What makes Japan's betrayal of principles so heinous is that they, unlike the West, once participated in civilized relations. They once followed Chinese models of propriety. Where the West chose instead to rely on the legalistic treaty for standards of behavior, there was no reason for Japan to do so. It has deliberately abandoned Chinese propriety.

In addition to this argument based on Chinese history, Chen and Ying make use of a second point of reference. Given that Japan has chosen to imitate Western ways, it is appalling that it does not respect even that set of standards. Chen and Ying are not so single-mindedly "conservative" as to hold Japan accountable only to Chinese principles; they do acknowledge the new ways of containing power in the world. They advocate obeying treaties, and significantly, make a precedent of international law:

Furthermore, now that all nations are opening up to international trade, they can take advantage of official boundaries without awakening a martial spirit of invasion, because they have treaties. These days, Japan does not honor its treaties. . . . As a present plan, we should publicize Japan's crime of treaty-breaking and report it to all nations. Moreover, on the basis of international law, we should strictly round up all Dwarfs and disengage all armies in Taiwan.80

To Chen and Ying, treaties safeguard a nation from potential excesses or perversion of trade; they believe that advantageous exploitation of interna-
tional boundaries by way of trade might very well turn to warfare. To put it another way, where nations once may have brazenly invaded each other for economic advantages, treaties provide a means to regulate such economic advantages. Again, Japan is acting perversely—not following the ideal behavior exemplified by “all nations.” Chen and Ying imagine recourse in international law, which represents an adequate and necessary set of principles applicable equally to all nations. Reporting Japan to these nations should have the effect of singling Japan out for her singularly unprincipled actions. Japan’s name and reputation will be tarnished.

The careful reader will notice a striking “division of labor” in the language of these anti-Japanese arguments, which I have tried to reproduce in my above examples. “Dwarf” and “Japan” connote different objects. Where “Dwarf” and its variants signify elements of a textual past, the subjects of Dwarf pirate narratives, “Japan” signifies a collective agent (or set of agents) involved in present incidents, and the linking of the two permits a case to be made about the nature of the problem in Taiwan. Chinese officials refer to the “Dwarfs” and “Dwarf pirates” in history texts so as to establish the base character of the present aggressors in Taiwan. At the same time, officials refer to “Japan” in describing the present activities of Japanese agents in Taiwan, and interweave those motives borrowed from received texts that pejoratively attest to the Dwarfish nature of the Japanese agents. The validity of this exchange of “Dwarf” for “Japan” (and vice versa) depends on the reader’s acceptance of a certain reading of history; this is why, I believe, historicist arguments begin by asserting the historical “fact” that Japan was formerly known as the Dwarf Kingdom. Such interchange of the terms “Dwarf” and “Japan,” like that in Jin Anqing and Chen Qiuyan, serves to identify the incident in Taiwan as a lack of principles specifically symptomatic of the vile behavior of reprehensible Dwarfs. Without such an account of the “Dwarf” character of “Japan,” the Taiwan incident would be incomprehensible, and in fact, as one of the more “pragmatic” officials laments: “How can we reasonably discuss [the situation] with them?” The point is that the Dwarfish Japanese do not act in accord with civilized principles, or reason.

The peculiar nature of this account is traceable, I believe, to the geo-moral conceptualization of proximity. When Chinese considered foreign lands in relation to their Civilization, they privileged space and morality.

The difficulty with figuring Japan into that relationship in the late nineteenth century is that two versions of Japan were available, referring Japan to two different spaces and correspondingly inconsistent moral natures. There were, as I have documented, the Dwarf outside Japan and the Japanese inside Japan; and the moral history of the former had degenerated from good to bad, while the moral history of the latter was unpredictable: sometimes commendable, sometimes reprehensible. If “historicist” Chinese commentators on diplomatic policy tended to privilege the accounts of reprehensible Dwarfs outside Japan, that is because both diplomacy itself and “historicist” ideals for foreign relations invoke that very space: Civilization from the center scrutinized Japanese within Chinese territory.

That is to say, “Dwarf” in addition to all its deprecatory content, also invokes the abandoned ideal of Japanese tributary relations. It is the one element of early Qing narratives of Japan uncomfortably remaining in the historicist version of events, and accordingly, it is the element Li Hongzhang and other pragmatists had so quickly attempted to negate when they denied that “Japan” was a tributary domain. We see here two versions of a rather straightforward discontinuity over time, and an attempt to work out the fact that conditions had changed. Where historicists began with the assumption that the “Dwarf Kingdom” had been a tributary domain, and showed that “Japan” too continued in the practice, pragmatists cut them short by declaring that Japan was no longer a tributary domain. Relations had changed. This, I believe, is the substance of certain Chinese officials’ intellectual difficulty with accepting Japan’s new status “under Heaven.” But this contradiction highlights two attendant problems of the day: On the one hand, it makes an issue of the pertinence of the past as a guide to action in the present and changing world, a matter I return to in later chapters. On the other hand, it exposes a distinctive weakness in late Qing knowledge of outside peoples: the Chinese had faulty understanding of Japan, and the texts to which they turned for information were quite out of date. This deficiency would soon be remedied.

The exchange of ambassadors provided by the friendship treaty of 1871 had been delayed, first by the 1874 incident in Taiwan, and then by the death of the Tongzhi emperor and the accession of the Guangxu emperor in 1875. Not until late 1877 did the Chinese ambassador He Ruzhang depart from
Shanghai, arriving at Nagasaki on November 30—that being the twenty-second day of the tenth month in the second year of the reign of His Highest Majesty the Guangxu emperor. Neither an ambassador nor any members of his entourage can readily engage in the sort of polemics that we have seen here. Theirs is a social and representative function; and the encounters between this first Chinese embassy and their Japanese hosts are for the most part a genial and thoughtful exchange, what we might anticipate from the protégés of Li Hongzhang or Zeng Guofan. The next chapter examines the records of these encounters, and thereafter we turn to the Chinese representations of their experiences in Japan.

2 Civilization as Universal Practice

The Context of Writing and Poetry

To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive, that my future disappearance in principle will not prevent from functioning and from yielding, and yielding itself to, reading and rewriting. Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context”

The power of wen is great indeed!
Lin Xie, The Literary Mind and Carving Dragons

I have argued that the largely Confucian project of Civilization (wenming), as a component of the ideology of the imperial state, served nineteenth-century Chinese scholars as a means to locate Japan within a Chinese worldview, both historically and in terms of present relations. But as we have seen, Japan’s was a contested position—for some, a former participant in imperial tributary relations; for others, a sinified and still civilized neighbor across the Eastern Sea; for still others, a renegade and treacherous barbarian. It is perhaps because of the acrimony in this very dispute that when some Chinese in the late nineteenth century encountered Japan in a favorable light, they intensified an aspect of the ideology of Civilization that I examine here: they specifically referred to Japan in terms of tong wen—“shared language,” and by extension, “shared Civilization.” For at the personal level of friendly interactions among Chinese and Japanese scholars, this element of the ideology of Civilization even more successfully served as a means to include Japan within Chinese Civilization. Japanese scholars were able to participate not only in “conversations” conducted in the literary Chinese language but also in the ritualized play that most defined civilized sociability: occasional poetry.

Brushtalking

The men who gathered intermittently over a period of years in the company of Ōkōchi Teruna formed a distinctive society. Ōkōchi, the former